

Good afternoon. I have a statement to read and will then take questions. My name is Mark Lockhart and I am the County Fire and EMS Chief for Stafford County, Virginia. The Stafford County Fire and Rescue Department is a combination volunteer and career department committed to excellence and focused on our core values of Professionalism, Integrity, Honor and Respect.

I am here today to discuss an incident that occurred Saturday, February 27. Before I describe that incident, first and foremost we are grateful that the patient involved is home and doing well. I want to make clear that the reason this situation came under review by our department is because of the way the patient was transported to the hospital, which involved a fire engine instead of an ambulance. This is a highly unusual occurrence for our department, and as we do in situations that appear to veer from our established practice, we initiated a review.

On Saturday, February 27, at 11:11 am units from Stafford County Fire and Rescue were dispatched to a local fast-food restaurant for an infant having a seizure. An Engine with three crew members, including two Emergency Medical Technicians from the Falmouth station and a paramedic transport unit with two crew members from the Stafford station responded. Based on other calls occurring around that time in the County, these were the closest units for the call location. En route to the location, the officer in charge of the Falmouth engine attempted to contact the medic unit twice to determine their

location. The medic unit responded that they were “southbound on Route 1” but did not provide a cross street. Shortly thereafter, the Falmouth engine arrived on the scene - four minutes and twenty-five seconds after dispatch. The patient was quickly assessed by the EMTs from the Falmouth engine and the officer in charge, made the decision to transport the patient in the fire engine. Our review found that at the time the engine initiated transport, two minutes and six seconds after arriving on the scene, the medic unit was approximately 4.6 miles away and a basic life support ambulance was approximately 1.7 miles away. The basic life support ambulance offered to rendezvous with the engine to transport the patient and the officer in charge denied that offer.

From our review, basic emergency medical care was provided to the patient based on the assessment performed by the officer in charge of the engine. Two of the three crew members are Emergency Medical Technician-Basic or EMT-Bs and one of them provided basic life support care to the patient during the twelve minute and fifty-four second transport to the emergency department at Mary Washington Hospital. The child was placed on a seat in the rear cab of the fire engine in a turnout coat with a seatbelt and held by the crew members.

As I mentioned, transporting a patient in a fire engine is highly unusual and that is what triggered our internal review of this incident. Any time we have an incident under review that we deem significant, we place the personnel, volunteer or career, on non-punitive administrative leave. While on non-punitive

administrative leave, department members are not operational – they do not run calls or provide emergency service. They may still be in stations or perform administrative functions. This differs from suspension in that suspension is a disciplinary action and punitive in nature. Members on suspension are not allowed in stations or to represent themselves as members of the department. We have taken no disciplinary action at this time. When a matter is under review, we place the involved personnel, volunteer or career, on non-punitive administrative leave while the internal review is conducted as we did in this case.

Our internal review process is based upon due process and ensuring the appropriate steps are taken to protect both the members involved as well as the community we serve. We have completed the internal review of this incident concurrent with a similar review being conducted by the Virginia Department of Health, Office of Emergency Medical Services. Our internal review was completed Sunday and we found the following:

1. The Falmouth Fire Engine is licensed in the Commonwealth of VA as a Non-Transport EMS Vehicle. Virginia OEMS regulation 12VAC5-31-800 *A vehicle maintained and operated for response to the location of a medical emergency to provide immediate medical care at the basic or advanced life support level (excluding transport) shall be permitted as a non-transport response vehicle.* Transporting a patient in a non-transport licensed vehicle is a violation of this regulation.

2. The officer in charge of the engine, while Nationally Registered as an Emergency Medical Technician, is not certified to practice in the Commonwealth of Virginia. This is largely an administrative matter through the Office of EMS that will be addressed with the individual. The other EMT onboard the engine is Nationally Registered as an Emergency Medical Technician and certified to practice in the Commonwealth of Virginia. However, neither one of these members is currently approved to provide care by our department's Operational Medical Director. Again, this is an administrative matter that will be addressed with the individuals involved.
3. The care provided to the patient was not the question. Our focus has been on the decision to transport the patient in the fire truck. The decision to transport in the fire engine was based on the information available to the officer in charge at the time and his assessment findings. We did, however, find that the department medical protocol for this type of patient was not followed and that will be addressed with the individuals involved.

I offered to meet with the Falmouth Chief and the individuals involved. They were unwilling to meet. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss returning the members in question to operational status. It is my desire to conclude this matter with the leadership at Falmouth and get these members back to doing the good work of Stafford County Fire and Rescue. To

that end, a memo was emailed to the Falmouth Chief within the last few minutes indicating that both members are being returned to operational status as of 4 p.m. today.

As for next steps, they are

- Address the Commonwealth certification issue with the members involved, the Office of EMS, and our Operational Medical Director.
- Receive the report from the Virginia Office of EMS and act on any recommendations that they make or actions that they may take.
- Review our practice/process of handling unusual incidents

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that Stafford County is focused on a high level of professionalism in all that we do. The reason for our review is that transporting a patient on a firetruck did not conform to our normal practice. As we would with anything that veers from our normal practice, we initiated an internal review. We've completed that review and those individuals have been returned to operational status.

We are a combination volunteer and career department responding to many hazards. I am proud of the partnership between volunteers and career staff and the incredible work they do day in and day out to serve our residents and visitors.

I am happy to take questions.

